

eral times to run off one-reelers that the company happened to be in a hurry for,—Seth Twomley and his whole bunch of silent supernumeraries failed to show up. I swore; I raved; I tore my hair and stood on my head.

When I had spent a little of my vocal fire and brimstone, I grabbed Doris and hauled her under the trees. She was really penitent; but even that didn't soften my heart—which organ is usually of summer-butter consistency.

"Pardon the French," I said caustically, "but you have sure played hell now—"

"And then some," she confessed honestly. "I warned you about it long ago—"

"I always was too much of a fool to take advice. That's why I'm a thrill-woman." "And you didn't pay any attention," I went on, ignoring her interruptions. "You went and courted that big, handsome boob and made him fall in love with you—"

"It was such a cinch!"

"And, now that you've amused yourself with him, he's discovered that you were only playing with him, and he's jumped the job. All the money I've spent in salaries gone to the devil, all my time wasted, all the company's time wasted, half the scenes to be re-filmed—and, last of all, a big, honest mountaineer with a broken heart—all because you wanted to have a good time. I'm ashamed of you—and disgusted with you, Doris!"

She gazed straight at me, her eyes brimming with tears. "Spill it all," she urged. "I got it comin' to me, an' I might's well have it all in one big dose."

So I "spilled it all," and when I finished she was as contrite, as sincerely contrite, as ever an addlepated little woman could be.

"And, leaving me and the company and the money all out of it," I persisted, "think of poor Seth. Think of the dignity of what he's done. Dead in love with you—and you handing him the icy mitten; and now he does like a Laura Jean Libby character—walks off into his haunts rather than suffer further rebuffs at your hands, and—lugubriously—"all of the supes with him. Why, Doris, you've turned his heart against womankind, and—"

She was blubbering. "Cut it—cut it, please. I can't stand any more, Bill. I—I— Oh, gee! honest, I never knew what I was doing. I was just trying to kid him along."

"And you succeeded. You bet you succeeded!"

"I didn't mean anything by it. And he was such a boob—I just couldn't pass up the chance."

"No"—sarcastically. "And here I am with about thirty unfinished scenes in a five-reel picture. And my supes gone. I clenched my right fist and slammed it into the left palm. "They've got to come back!"

She jumped about six feet.

"Yes!"

"They've got to!"

"How?"

"You caused the trouble, and you've got to solve the difficulty. You must see Seth—"

"Go out there?"

"Yes—I'll go with you. I won't tip any of the others off to it, if you don't want me to. I'll just declare a holiday, and we'll go out there. I've just simply got to leave it to you to straighten things up with him, and humor him into bringing the bunch back."

"But—but—how—"

"How? How? This ain't a question of 'how,' Doris. It's a question of 'must.' And it's up to you. Get me?"

"I get you. I'll try—"

WITHIN a half hour we were driving out toward the little mountain settlement in which Seth lived. And Doris hadn't passed up any bets in making her preparations. She was dolled out in a bewitching blue-and-white middie, with a big blue bow tie in front right where the V of the collar runs into the rest of the blouse; dark blue skirt— She was some stunning looker, all right. And I knew that if she dropped her flirtation tactics

this once she could make Seth Twomley, or 'most any other man, for that matter, do anything she wanted him to.

I really felt sorry for the big fellow, and I admired the moral courage he had shown in dropping her after a rebuff. He must have seen that she was playing with him; and, despite rough exteriors, I'd long since discovered that the North Carolina mountaineers are a sensitive lot. I turned to the girl.

"He must've proposed to you yesterday," I hazarded.

She had the grace to flush.

"Y-yes. He did."

"It'd serve you right if you were the director," I came back, with some bitterness. "Everything any fool member of my company does reacts on me. I've got to deliver the goods—excuses can't be shown in the picture houses."

It was a long drive to Cordesville, where Seth lived. And Bat Cave is a pretty good distance out itself. The road narrowed and grew rougher and climbed higher. The trees became scrubby and bent. The white, fleecy clouds were below us. I grew a mite sorry that I hadn't brought a revolver, although I'm not much of a believer in hip-pocket artillery.

But finally we crossed the last big ridge and dipped down into the grassy hollow where squatted about twenty ramshackle cabins. We had struck Cordesville. I made up my mind that if we got away with our lives we'd come out there for some pictures.

I slowed up the team and bumped down the rocky road. Half way down, Doris squealed.

"There's Seth," she said. I pulled the team up short.

HE was sitting on the grass, square chin in his well shaped hand, and the breeze blowing through his wavy hair. When he saw us, he rose and strode toward the rig. I didn't like the cocksure swing of his stride.

"Howdy," he greeted gruffly, his eye fixed menacingly, uneasily, on Doris.

"Howdy," we greeted in chorus.

"What can I do f'r you-uns?" he asked awkwardly.

Doris was silent.

"You—you quit the job at Bat Cave?" I asked.

"Uh-huh."

"We've come to get you to go back with us—and bring the others."

Doris seemed tongue-tied. I had to do all the talking. It's a shame the way they all throw a director down.

"Cain't do hit."

"Can't?"

"Nope."

"But why?"

He glanced uneasily first at me, then at Doris, then at me again.

"Cain't say. Mebbe I c'n tell you alone."

"Tell both of us."

Once more he glanced at Doris.

"Shall I?" he questioned her.

"Certainly," she snapped.

"Wal," he drawled steadily, eyeing the ground studiously, "y' see, hit's thisaway. Ever sence I been in Bat Cave a-workin' f'r you, I been treated right, an' I done my best. But—wal," he paused, then continued desperately. "This yere young gal she goes an' falls in love with me. I tried to git away f'um her, but I couldn't, nohow. I stood it's long as possible; but, y' see—yestiddy she goes an' proposes to me that I should marry her. An' I cain't—"

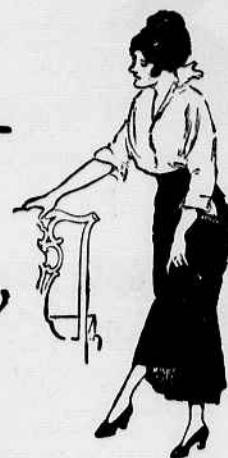
"But—"

"They hain't no 'buts,'" he went on relentlessly, avoiding Doris's flashing eyes. "I'm plumb sorry she's in love with me, but I jes' cain't marry her. An' I cain't go back, even ef she'd promise to let me alone, 'case some of the boys done tol' my wife about the way she was pesterin' me—"

That's all there is to the story. You may be interested, though, in knowing that Doris was cured—and that, although Seth Twomley never came himself, he did have the grace to send the others back, so that I was able to film the whole five reels of "The Moonshiner's Wife."



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